

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE A-1

NEW YORK TIMES
11 SEPTEMBER 1979

SOVIET SAYS TROOPS ARE TO ADVISE CUBA; DENIES COMBAT ROLE

Dobrynin's Position Is Said to Differ From Editorial Carried in Pravda

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Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Sept. 10 — United States statements that there is a Soviet combat brigade in Cuba were rejected as "totally groundless" by Pravda today, hours after a meeting during which Secretary of State Cyrus R. Vance and the Soviet Ambassador began a search for a diplomatic solution to the situation.

Pravda, the Soviet Communist Party's official organ, published an editorial saying all Soviet military personnel in Cuba were advisers and that there were no combat units there. The State Department stood by its contention that 2,000 to 3,000 Soviet combat troops had recently been discovered in Cuba.

"For 17 years there has existed in Cuba a training center at which Soviet military personnel have helped Cuban servicemen master Soviet military equipment that is used by the Cuban Army," Pravda said in a lengthy front-page editorial that was later distributed by the press agency Tass. "Neither the number nor the functions of the Soviet personnel have changed throughout all these years. All contentions about the arrival in Cuba of 'organized combat units' are totally groundless."

Poor Coordination in Moscow

Well-placed Administration officials said that Ambassador Anatoly F. Dobrynin, in a two-hour conversation with Mr. Vance, did not follow the line voiced by Pravda. This led to the possibility that the Soviet Union was following a "two-track" policy on that there was poor coordination by Soviet officials.

American officials sought to avoid a confrontation over the Pravda article, and drew a distinction between the Pravda denial and the Vance-Dobrynin talk.

"The question of the Soviet unit in Cuba is under discussion in diplomatic channels," a State Department spokesman said, "and we will make no comment on those discussions."

Vance Voices U.S. Concern

"As to the editorial in Pravda, it is not a helpful contribution to the resolution of the problem," the spokesman said. "There will be no further comment."

Details of the Vance-Dobrynin talk were not immediately available, but officials said Mr. Vance repeated the United States concern over the newly discovered brigade.

Pravda, the most authoritative Soviet newspaper, usually speaks for the Soviet leadership. Its editorial seemed to put the Soviet Union in sharp disagreement with the United States over the status of Soviet forces in Cuba.

It also seemed to complicate the Administration's hope for a diplomatic solution and eventual passage of the strategic arms limitation treaty now being debated in the Senate.

Pravda maintained that all Soviet military personnel in Cuba have been there solely as a training unit, while the United States insists that in addition to a 1,500-to-2,000-man training mission, there are 2,000 to 3,000 combat troops.

Both President Carter and Mr. Vance have stated that American intelligence confirmed the presence of a Soviet combat brigade of artillery, armored and infantry elements.

The statements have led to demands from key senators for a linkage between the removal of the troops and the passage of the arms pact.

Pravda said the Administration, instead of "cutting short" the campaign about the Soviet combat troops, had fanned it.

"It is absolutely clear," Pravda said, "that either by its size or functions, the Soviet military personnel in Cuba do not present and cannot present any threat to the United States."

Until today, the Soviet Union had been silent about the reports of the combat brigade. This had encouraged some Administration officials to believe that a solution could be worked out quietly. Now, the situation seems to have become more complicated, in that both countries' prestige could be involved.

quiet diplomacy, had ordered that no comment be issued about his meeting with Mr. Dobrynin, except to say that they would meet again tomorrow or Wednesday. Mr. Dobrynin entered and left the State Department through its garage, avoiding reporters.

The Administration has said it would not be satisfied with maintaining the current status of the troops in Cuba, but it has avoided saying what it wanted the Russians to do.

Desire to Avoid Ultimatum

Mr. Carter, Mr. Vance and Zbigniew Brzezinski, the President's national security adviser, are said to want to avoid seeming to issue an ultimatum to the Soviet Union on an issue that, they agree, does not directly threaten United States security.

Rather, the hope is that quiet diplomacy can persuade the Soviet Union to move to defuse the situation, either by removing the force, turning its equipment over to the Cubans, or issuing an acceptable clarification of the brigade's mission.

Among the subjects discussed today, an official said, was the reason the troops were in Cuba. There has been considerable speculation in Washington on their role. The leading theory has been that they were sent as a security shield for President Fidel Castro, perhaps as long ago as the 1960's. There has also been speculation that the force was there to protect Soviet intelligence-gathering facilities.

Until today, the only response from Moscow was indirect: some minor newspaper stories raising the question of American forces at the Guantanamo Bay naval station in Cuba.

Time to Carry Out Mission

In a closed-door session this morning, the Senate Armed Services Committee was briefed on the situation by Mr. Vance and Adm. Stansfield Turner, the Director of Central Intelligence. Participants said Mr. Vance urged the senators to give him time to carry out his diplomatic assignment with a minimum of public pressure or ultimatums.

Mr. Dobrynin, who returned to Washington last night after a vacation in the Soviet Union that was extended by his father's death, is the highest-ranking Soviet official to be involved in discussions over the brigade.

He is a full member of the policy-making Central Committee of the Communist Party, and is now the dean of the diplomatic corps in Washington, having been stationed here since March 1962.

Ironically, the veteran envoy was also involved in the negotiations surrounding the Cuban missile crisis of October 1962.